**Development of   
China’s Distant-Water Fisheries**

The State Council Information Office of   
the People’s Republic of China

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Preamble

Sustainable utilization of the ocean is essential to the survival and development of humanity. China was one of the first countries to utilize the ocean’s resources. More than 4,000 years ago, people in coastal areas of China were already living off the sea and fishing and had started exploring the ocean and utilizing its resources along with the people of other countries.

Since its distant-water fisheries industry (DWF) first emerged in 1985, China has been conducting practical and mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries in accordance with relevant bilateral fisheries agreements or arrangements. Conforming to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other applicable international laws, it is deeply involved in multilateral fisheries governance and regional fisheries management under the framework of the United Nations (UN). It actively exercises the right to utilize high seas fisheries resources, and it fulfills to the letter the relevant obligations concerning resource conservation and management.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, China has earnestly advanced the vision of a global community of shared future and a maritime community of shared future, steadily strengthened the conservation of the marine eco-environment, and consistently followed the path of green and sustainable development of the DWF sector. In order to realize scientific conservation and sustainable utilization of fisheries resources and achieve high-quality DWF development, China is committed to optimizing the industrial structure, promoting transformation and upgrading, improving quality and efficiency, strictly controlling the scale of development, strengthening standardized management, and combating illegal fishing.

The Chinese government is publishing this white paper to present a complete picture of China’s philosophy, principles, and policies in the DWF sector and its success in honoring international agreements, to share with the world its experience in DWF administration, and to promote international cooperation and exchanges in this field.

I. High-Quality Development of   
China’s DWF Sector

DWF is an important part of China’s fishing industry. Based on win-win cooperation, security, stability, green and sustainable development, China has expanded international exchanges, conducted mutually beneficial cooperation through multiple channels and in multiple forms, kept to the path of high-quality development of the industry, and contributed to the development of the global DWF industry and the supply of aquatic products.

1. Steady development of international aquatic production and trade

Aquatic products are globally recognized as healthy foods and play a key role in global food and nutrition security. Sustainable aquaculture development and effective fisheries management are essential to ensuring the supply of aquatic products in the international market.

In recent years, international trade in aquatic products has grown significantly. According to statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in 2020, the European Union (EU) was the largest single importing market, accounting for 16 percent of the global value of aquatic imports (excluding intra-EU trade), and the United States (US) was the largest importing country, accounting for 15 percent of the global value of aquatic imports. The top three exporting countries were China, Norway and Vietnam, with their exports accounting for 25 percent of the global total export value. According to statistics from the General Administration of Customs of China, China exported almost 3.75 million tonnes of aquatic products in 2020, and the worth of its exported aquatic products accounted for 12 percent of the global total. The main destinations included countries and regions such as the EU, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Japan, and the US. As the world’s largest exporter of aquatic products, China has made a significant contribution to the global supply and consumption of aquatic products.

According to The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 released by the FAO, global fisheries and aquaculture production reached an all-time record of 214 million tonnes in 2020. Within this figure, aquaculture production was 122.6 million tonnes, accounting for 57 percent. China is the world’s largest source of aquatic products, with a total output of 65.5 million tonnes in 2020. Its aquaculture production – which reached 52.2 million tonnes in the year, or about 80 percent of its total aquatic products – also led the world, accounting for about 40 percent of the global total. The development of China’s fisheries and aquaculture industry has made an important contribution to meeting its own and the world’s demand for aquatic products, reducing the use and dependence on natural marine fisheries resources, and promoting the scientific conservation and sustainable use of global fisheries resources.

2. China’s contribution to the world’s DWF development

The world’s DWF has a long history, with detailed fisheries statistics dating back to the 1950s. Different countries and regions played a greater or lesser role in different historical periods. These countries and regions, along with other coastal countries, have played a positive role in developing and utilizing global marine fisheries resources, promoting the supply of marine foods and nutrition, and ensuring the livelihoods and development of coastal communities.

China’s DWF sector began in 1985. Although it started relatively late, after more than 30 years of hard work, China has made significant progress. For many years, it has signed reciprocal cooperation agreements with relevant countries and regions in Asia, Africa, South America, and Oceania. In accordance with these agreements and the laws and regulations of the relevant countries, China has established orderly fisheries cooperation with more than 40 countries and regions.

In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other international laws, China has joined the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation, the North Pacific Fisheries Commission, the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement and other organizations, and approved the International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated Fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean. China attaches great importance to honoring the international DWF agreements. It actively fulfills the obligations of member states under multilateral fisheries treaties and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), and carries out the due diligence obligations of flag states[[1]](#footnote-0) for high seas fisheries that are not yet managed by RFMOs. It actively promotes the establishment of relevant RFMOs, continuously strengthens the regulation of the DWF sector, and champions the scientific conservation and sustainable utilization of global fisheries resources.

In 2022, China had 177 approved DWF enterprises and 2,551 DWF vessels (including 1,498 high seas fishing vessels) operating in the high seas of the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic oceans, and the seas around Antarctica, as well as in the waters under the jurisdiction of cooperating countries. The total catch for the year was around 2.33 million tonnes.

3. Achieving better development of China’s DWF sector

As a developing country, China still lags somewhat behind developed countries in terms of fishing vessels and equipment, detection of fisheries resources, and the contribution of science and technology to industrial development. To adapt to and fulfill the new requirements of international fisheries governance, and based on its own development needs, China has released successive policy documents for DWF development, such as the National Plan for Fisheries Development in the 14th Five-Year Plan Period, the Guidelines on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Distant-Water Fishery in the 14th Five-Year Plan Period, the Action Plan for the “Regulation Improvement Year” of Distant-Water Fishery, and the Three-Year Action Plan for the Personnel Training of Distant-Water Fishery.

In the 14th Five-year Plan period (2021-2025) and beyond, China will make sustained efforts to promote the concentration and development of the entire DWF industrial chain, consolidate the foundations, increase the comprehensive governance capacity, and provide effective support. By optimizing the industrial structure, strengthening scientific and technological foundations, increasing regulatory capabilities, participating extensively in international fisheries governance, and improving the policy system, China aims to achieve high-quality development of its DWF sector. By 2025 China’s total DWF output and the size of its DWF fleet will be stable, the overall quality and production efficiency of the industry will be much higher, the number of violations and accidents will be much lower, regional and industrial configuration will be further optimized, supervision and administration will be more effective, and a significant effort will be directed towards the implementation of international agreements.

II. Coordinating Resource Conservation   
and Sustainable Use

China puts equal emphasis on the protection and development of fisheries resources, and takes key measures such as voluntary moratoria on the high seas. It continuously strengthens fisheries resource conservation and management of the ecosystem, and pays close attention to climate change and biodiversity conservation. It has achieved remarkable results in promoting long-term sustainable use of fisheries resources.

1. Committing to long-term sustainable use of resources

Fisheries resources are renewable, and setting the allowable catch based on scientific assessment is therefore key to the sustainable use of these resources. China follows the path of green and sustainable development, balances conservation with exploitation of fisheries resources, and consistently advocates reasonable conservation and long-term sustainable use of resources on the basis of scientific assessment. China supports the fishing strategies set by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and other relevant RFMOs. It manages fisheries resources properly and controls total fishing capacity. It strictly abides by the fishing quota systems and resource recovery plans adopted by RFMOs such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, maintains the catches of relevant species within the quota, and supports the rational transfer of quotas and related fishing capacity.

Moratorium is a crucial tool for managing international fisheries and conserving resources. China began to implement voluntary moratoria on some high seas from 2020 onwards, with squid as the target species – this is an important measure to further strengthen the scientific conservation and sustainable use of high seas fisheries resources. This is in addition to the moratoria set by the regulations of RFMOs such as the seasonal moratorium measure for tuna purse seine in the West and Central Pacific Ocean.

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| Panel 1 Voluntary Moratoria on the High Seas |
| For the purpose of conservation and long-term sustainable use of fisheries resources on the high seas, in 2020 China tried out three-month voluntary fishing moratoria in parts of the high seas in the Southwest Atlantic Ocean and the East Pacific Ocean, and officially implemented the measure in 2021. Fishing bans were observed from July 1 to September 30 in the high seas of the Southwest Atlantic Ocean between 32 degrees and 44 degrees south and 48 degrees and 60 degrees west; while from September 1 to November 30, fishing bans covered the high seas in the East Pacific Ocean between 5 degrees north and 5 degrees south and 95 degrees to 110 degrees west. During this period, all Chinese squid jiggers and trawlers in the areas suspended operations.  In 2022, China further included the North Indian Ocean high seas into the scope of voluntary moratoria. Fishing bans were observed from July 1 to September 30 in parts of the high seas in the North Indian Ocean between the equator to 22 degrees north, and 55 degrees to 70 degrees east (excluding the jurisdictional waters under the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement). During the moratorium period, Chinese squid jiggers and light purse seiners suspended fishing operations. Since then, high seas areas (or species) covered by China’s DWF but not yet subject to the jurisdiction of RFMOs have been included in the scope of voluntary moratoria.  The Chinese government has strictly supervised the voluntary moratoria, and the relevant distant-water fishing vessels have strictly observed the moratoria. According to the resource monitoring data, the relative resource abundance of squid species in the Southwest Atlantic and Southeast Pacific has improved. As an innovative measure of China to actively conserve fisheries resources on the high seas, the voluntary moratorium mechanism has achieved remarkable results. The time and scope of the moratoria will be adjusted according to expert argumentation and public consultation based on the actual situation and resource conditions. |

2. Strengthening the protection and management of bycatch species

China pays close attention to the sustainable development of bycatch species related to the target species, emphasizes the assessment and monitoring of bycatch species resources, and encourages and participates in information collection and scientific research. China effectively protects sharks, manta rays, sea turtles, seabirds and related marine mammals. It actively implements the FAO International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks, and strictly abides by the conservation and management measures of RFMOs on sharks and other species. China has formulated and implemented the Action Plan of Sea Turtle Conservation (2019-2033), and has prepared an overall plan of sea turtle conservation and management at national level. China further strengthens conservation and management of marine mammals, requiring distant-water fishing vessels to strictly comply with the conservation and management measures of RFMOs, and to make sure safe release, data collection, information reporting, scientific research, and supervision and management of marine mammals and other bycatch species are well-conducted. China prohibits large-scale driftnet fishing on the high seas. It refuses to approve the construction of any new pair trawlers and large-scale lighting purse seiners with cod-end that have destructive effects on fisheries resources. It actively develops and puts into use eco-friendly fishing boats, fishing gears, and fishing technologies. It also offers more fishing gear options, promotes energy-saving attracting-fish lamp in squid jigging fishery and eco-friendly fishing gear and methods in tuna longline fisheries, and develops non-entanglement and biodegradable fish aggregation devices in tuna purse seine fishery. China carries out experiments to reduce the harm caused to seabirds and experiments on the safe release of marine mammals incidentally caught in Antarctic krill fishing, so as to protect bycatch species and rare and endangered species.

3. Focusing on climate change responses and biodiversity conservation

China attaches great importance to climate change responses and biodiversity conservation, and actively conducts research on the impact of climate change on the distribution, migration, and regeneration capacity of fish and other marine species. Research into the relations between climate change, fisheries resources, and the ecosystem and their management is also highly valued. In 2019, China supported the adoption of a climate change research proposal by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and supported the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission in adopting a proposal to focus on climate change in the management of tuna fisheries in 2022. Marine biodiversity is closely related to marine ecosystem protection and marine sustainable development. China successfully chaired the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was held in two phases, first in Kunming and then in Montreal. Thanks to its leadership efforts, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was agreed at the meeting. China actively participates in the negotiation of agreements on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction and makes a significant contribution to global biodiversity conservation.

4. Stepping up resource conservation and international compliance efforts

In an effort to facilitate high-quality development, China implements policies to support both the conservation of fisheries resources and industrial restructuring in the new era. It promotes the high-quality development and modernization of its fisheries, creating a new dynamic for development. At the beginning of the 14th Five-year Plan period (2021-2025), China cancelled fuel subsidies for distant-water fishing vessels. It supports the construction of fisheries infrastructure and the green and circular development of the industry. It has worked to promote the research and conservation of fisheries resources and international compliance capabilities. China observes international conventions to protect international fisheries resources, and to research, monitor and evaluate fisheries resources. These efforts aim to promote the long-term sustainable use of fisheries resources and create a new dynamic for green and sustainable DWF development.

DWF enterprises and fishing vessels are the main entities that must comply with international conventions and operate in accordance with laws and regulations. In 2022, China formally implemented a compliance evaluation system for DWF enterprises. The performance of enterprises will directly influence administrative approval and policy support. Through a system of incentives and sanctions, China guides enterprises to continuously improve their management systems, strictly implement management measures, avoid violations, and effectively improve their performance. This system, which has attracted the attention of all sides, has effectively promoted the standardized management and international compliance capability of DWF enterprises, and won widespread recognition.

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| Panel 2 Compliance Evaluation System for DWF Enterprises |
| In order to increase the international compliance capability of DWF enterprises, to promote the high-quality development of DWF, and to promote the conservation and long-term sustainable use of global fisheries resources, China began to pilot a compliance evaluation system in 2019, which was fully implemented in 2022. The system includes quantitative indicators to measure management systems, implementation status, resource conservation, scientific and technological innovation, social responsibility, and violation of laws and regulations. It includes 3 first-level indicators, 10 second-level indicators, and 60 third-level indicators. The annual performance score of an enterprise is determined based on self-evaluation, preliminary examination by local authorities, and examination by the national fisheries authority.  In 2022, the overall compliance of enterprises engaged in DWF was good. The evaluation has increased the companies’ awareness and capabilities in terms of compliance. Enterprises are making more active use of green and environmentally friendly fishing gears and methods. Additionally, they are engaging more actively in tasks related to electronic logbook, electronic monitoring, national fisheries observer, and they have improved various work practices related to operation safety and environmental protection. |

III. Fulfilling the Flag State Duties   
in All Respects

As a responsible fishing nation, China strictly observes the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other multilateral agreements on fisheries it has joined. It performs its duties as a flag state[[2]](#footnote-1) in terms of the controls over total output and the number of fishing vessels, data collection and reporting, national fisheries observer program, etc., producing positive outcomes.

1. Continuing to improve the DWF licensing system

China has put in place a comprehensive DWF licensing system and relevant measures. No Chinese DWF vessel is permitted to work before going through registration and examination procedures and getting the authority’s approval in accordance with China’s Fisheries Law and the Administrative Regulations for Distant-Water Fisheries. Chinese DWF fleets fishing in certain sea areas have fulfilled registering procedures as required by authorized RFMOs. Multiple government departments have strengthened the management of DWF vessels by measures including examination and approval, registration and decommissioning, and fishing licensing. They have also issued standard format documents for fishing vessels such as the Fishing License of the People’s Republic of China (High Seas).

2. Implementing input and output control

China rigorously abides by the restrictions on the number and tonnage of fishing vessels and the species-based fishing quotas imposed by RFMOs. Its DWF sector remained stable during the 13th Five-year Plan period (2016-2020), and will continue to be under strict control during the 14th Five-year Plan period (2021-2025), with the goals of keeping the number of DWF vessels below 3,000 and their output around 2.3 million tonnes. The Chinese government announced in 2021 that China will not increase squid jiggers nor expand its squid fleets on the high seas, and formulated and implemented an individual vessel quota program on Pacific saury; these have been effective in regulating fishing activity. China strictly conforms to conservation and management measures such as seasonal and area fishing ban imposed by RFMOs, and has put in place voluntary ban for its fishing fleets on the high seas.



3. Gradually establishing a complete data collection and reporting system

China has intensified its efforts to collect and report basic statistics in the DWF sector, raise data quality, and promote sharing and integration. It has set up an inclusive DWF data collection framework, covering enterprise information, ship information, position monitoring, fishing logbook, transshipment of catches, national fisheries observers, port sampling, scientific survey and trial fishing, and reported data on fisheries to respective RFMOs in line with their requirements. China advocates sufficient and fair data sharing and research, maximizes the role of science-based data in decision making, protects data security, and makes its due contribution to conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources in all regions.

4. Rolling out electronic fishing logbook

China has imposed requirements for keeping fishing logbook for tuna, squid, jack mackerel, Pacific saury, and other species on the high seas, and retrieved logbooks from all fishing vessels, whose reporting quality continues to rise. Chinese ships also report to other countries as required when fishing in their waters. In order to acquire accurate data in real time, China is advancing the research, testing, and application of electronic reporting to cover all Chinese high seas fishing vessels, and has participated in RFMOs’ electronic reporting programs. In July 2022, the Chinese government issued administrative measures for electronic reporting, and announced the full implementation of the system as from January 2024 for all China-approved fishing vessels on the high seas.

5. Promoting the national fisheries observer program

China has implemented a national fisheries observer program to regulate and standardize the dispatch of observers. Its observer programs in the West and Central Pacific Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean have been reviewed or approved by respective RFMOs. After satisfying the RFMO mandated observer coverage rate of five percent, China has encouraged the use of electronic observers. It launched its high seas transshipment observer program in 2021 to oversee transshipment activities that do not fall under the management of RFMOs. China continues to reinforce its contingent of competent observers, and has incorporated this profession into the General Code of Occupational Classification of the People’s Republic of China (2022 Edition), laying institutional foundations for observer programs.



6. Strengthening management of high seas fishing vessels

China has rigorously complied with the conservation and management measures imposed by RFMOs. It has formulated and implemented special administrative measures for fishing activities in the North and South Pacific Ocean regions and for tuna, squid and other major species, and strengthened supervision and management of high seas fisheries and compliance with international treaties. In the high seas areas where Chinese DWF vessels concentrate, China has applied quota controls to squid fishing since 2021, focusing on the management of DWF squid jigging vessels that work in areas without RFMOs. It has optimized the regional distribution of fishing vessels, regulated their activities, and performed its duty of care as a flag state.

IV. Strictly Regulating the DWF Sector

China executes the world’s strictest management measures and regulations to monitor and position distant-water fishing vessels, and adopts a “zero tolerance” attitude towards illegal fishing. By reinforcing monitoring and management mechanisms and capabilities, China has made notable progress on critical issues and in priority areas such as monitoring and managing distant-water fishing vessels, managing crews, conducting monitoring and control over key sea areas, reinforcing capacity to regulate DWF, and ensuring overall stability in production of the sector.

1. Actively monitoring and regulating transshipments on the high seas

Based on the effective implementation of regulations formulated by RFMOs, China has begun to fully and independently monitor and regulate transshipments conducted by distant-water fishing vessels on the high seas since 2020. It has established a new platform that manages all distant-water fishing vessels, requiring a permit before and a report after a transshipment, and has begun to dispatch onboard observers or install onboard video surveillance systems. In April 2021, for the first time observers authorized by the Chinese government boarded distant-water fishing vessels to supervise transshipments on the high seas. In May 2022, China attended the Technical Consultation on the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, and contributed to the successful conclusion of the consultation and the adoption of the guidelines.

2. Further regulating seafood imports and exports

China always strictly regulates seafood imports and exports, and actively fulfills its obligations as a market state. In accordance with the conservation and management measures stipulated by relevant RFMOs, China verifies the legitimacy of imports and exports of bigeye tuna, swordfish, bluefin tuna and Antarctic toothfish, including products caught by Chinese DWF vessels. As requested by importing countries and regions such as the Republic of Korea (ROK), Chile and the EU and by exporting countries such as Russia, China verifies the legitimacy of imported and exported seafood, and conducts investigations and gives feedback in line with the verification requirements of relevant countries to ensure that all imported and exported catches are obtained through legal and regulated fishing. For species listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), China conducted introduction from the sea according to the requirements*.*

3. Resolute action against illegal fishing

China strictly regulates DWF, shows “zero tolerance” for illegal fishing, and severely punishes via legislation and administrative means any distant-water fishing vessel and company that has engaged in illegal fishing. China will carry out full-scale investigations on any report made by other countries and international organizations against suspicious activities conducted by Chinese distant-water fishing vessels. Should a violation be confirmed, the vessel responsible and the vessel owner(s) will be severely punished, and the result will be announced appropriately. Since 2016, six fishing companies have had their distant-water fishing enterprise qualification revoked, and 22 companies have been suspended from distant-water fishing. Punishments resulting from different violations imposed on vessels and skippers have included cancellation of all DWF projects, suspension of all DWF projects, a ban on applying for new DWF projects, and the imposition of fines, with total financial penalties exceeding RMB1 billion.

China resolutely supports and actively joins in the efforts made by the international community to curb illegal fishing. Starting from 2020, China dispatches law enforcement vessels every year to conduct fishery patrols and deal with illegal fishing activities on the high seas of the North Pacific. In 2016, along with the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), China impounded and penalized a foreign vessel that conducted an illegal transshipment of Antarctic toothfish. Since 2018, China has begun to inform its domestic ports of vessels blacklisted for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing by RFMOs to which China belongs, to ban these vessels from entering ports to land their catches, obtain supplies and refuel.

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| Panel 3 The Capture of the *Andrey Dolgov* |
| China is actively seeking to join the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and applies the agreement and other relevant measures to conduct port inspections in order to combat illegal fishing. It has achieved considerable success. In May 2016, after receiving a tip-off from the CCAMLR, the Chinese authorities carried out an inspection on the *Andrey Dolgov*, a foreign refrigerated transport vessel which had docked at a harbor in China’s Shandong Province and was suspected of transshipping illegal catches. Ultimately the vessel was convicted of illegally transshipping Antarctic toothfish. The CCAMLR placed the vessel on the IUU vessel list and requested the Chinese authorities to deal with the illegal catches. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, and local authorities carried out a joint law enforcement operation, seizing and auctioning the 110-tonne illegal catch. After deducting necessary expenses, the proceeds of the total sales were donated to the CCAMLR to fight against illegal fishing around Antarctica and conserve Antarctic marine living resources. China’s successful action against this illegal transshipment of Antarctic toothfish manifests its resolute determination to carry out port inspections and combat illegal catches. |

4. Championing the high seas boarding and inspection regime

China systematically supports the high seas boarding and inspection performed within the frameworks of RFMOs, with the aim of combating illegal fishing and effectively implementing conservation and management measures. China requires all Chinese fishing vessels to accept the high seas boarding and inspection carried out pursuant to regulations formulated by RFMOs.

In 2020, China began to register China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels with the North Pacific Fisheries Commission to obtain the right to board and inspect vessels on the high seas of the North Pacific to fulfill its obligations as a member state. Starting from 2021, China has sent the CCG vessels to carry out boarding and inspection on the high seas of the North Pacific and has taken steps pursuant to legitimate procedures to dispatch law enforcement vessels to sea areas under the jurisdiction of other RFMOs, working with the international community to play its part in combating illegal fishing on the high seas.

V. Reinforcing Scientific and Technological   
Support for the DWF Sector

China engages in scientific surveys of high seas fisheries resources, participates in research initiatives led by RFMOs, and progressively upgrades fishing vessels and equipment. These efforts reflect China’s commitment to scientific and technological innovation, transformation and upgrading, and high-quality development and efficiency in the fishing sector. The National Plan for Fisheries Development in the 14th Five-Year Plan Period sets a target to increase the contribution rate of scientific and technological progress in the sector from 63 percent in 2020 to 67 percent by 2025.

1. Improving scientific and technological support framework

China’s DWF management is based on scientific principles. It aims to establish and improve a comprehensive management and compliance technology support system, where competent authorities, industry associations, and scientific research institutes collaborate to develop management strategies, implement effective management measures, and evaluate their outcomes. Industry associations play a crucial role in organizing and coordinating fisheries operation, standardizing corporate behavior, providing employee training, strengthening industry self-discipline, and promoting best practices. To further ensure compliance, China has established a DWF compliance research center and a DWF data center. Additionally, efforts have been made to improve the mechanism for compliance and to strengthen scientific research institutions and think tanks, steadily improving the capacity and effectiveness of compliance.

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| Panel 4 Training for Compliance in DWF Companies |
| China places great importance on the training for compliance in DWF companies. Each year, authorities at various levels, industry associations, and scientific research institutes organize training sessions in diverse forms, focusing on different aspects of compliance. Some companies proactively conduct training programs on management measures and compliance. Notably, key management personnel receive special training. Since 2014, China has implemented strict regulations governing the credentials of DWF employees. A mechanism has been implemented for the admission of DWF personnel. A qualification training program for practitioners, conducted by the DWF Training Center under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, is mandatory for enterprise legal persons or general managers, specific project leaders, and other middle and high-level management personnel. Participants must complete designated courses, pass assessments, and obtain qualification certificates. As of the end of 2022, more than 4,000 middle and high-level management personnel have been trained through various programs.  These training initiatives, including qualification training for employees, have effectively increased the knowledge of DWF company management personnel in areas such as international fisheries laws and regulations and management systems, China’s DWF policies and management systems, and the handling of foreign-related fisheries issues. DWF companies have improved their ability to operate and implement management measures in compliance with laws and regulations. China will further strengthen the training of personnel engaged in the DWF industry, particularly focusing on company managers, captains of distant-water fishing vessels, and professional crew members. |

2. Advancing information technology in the DWF sector

China actively promotes the mechanization, automation, and digitalization of distant-water fishing vessels. It invests in the research and development and application of technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI) in the sector. Work is under way to adapt the BeiDou intelligent monitoring application system specifically for use in the sector. China is also participating in the research and testing of video surveillance systems for distant-water fishing vessels and contributing to the formulation of standards and specifications for the installation of video surveillance equipment on such vessels. The gradual rollout of pilot programs on key fish species and regional fishing vessels is being carried out. Furthermore, China actively engages in sharing its experimental experience in developing electronic monitoring/observation standards for RFMOs. In May 2023, China supported the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission’s resolution on electronic monitoring standards, marking the first management measure of its kind in regional tuna fisheries management organizations. Currently, more than 100 tuna fishing vessels – accounting for approximately 20 percent of all tuna fishing vessels in China – have been equipped with electronic monitoring systems.

3. Improving the survey and monitoring of DWF resources

Fisheries resource assessment and management recommendations depend on scientific data, and conducting resource surveys and monitoring is an internationally recognized method of obtaining reliable firsthand scientific data. From the 14th Five-year Plan period (2021-2025), China has implemented a systematic plan for surveying and monitoring DWF resources. The objective is to provide scientific and data support for the conservation and sustainable development of resources. This involves deploying professional scientific survey vessels to conduct comprehensive scientific surveys of fisheries resources in the high seas of the Northwest Pacific and the West and Central Pacific Ocean. Additionally, China encourages scientific research institutions to collaborate with DWF companies to conduct trial fishing on fisheries resources. The survey findings are shared with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and the survey research results continue to be submitted to provide a scientific foundation for resource assessment and the formulation of management measures. China actively cooperates with other countries involved to conduct scientific surveys of fisheries resources, thereby promoting the conservation and long-term sustainable use of fisheries resources in such countries’ waters. Furthermore, China is conducting a monitoring and evaluation project for significant global fish species resources. Research and monitoring activities focus on the population status of economically important fish species, bycatch species, and protected species. A database system is in place to provide scientific references for production management and resource conservation.

4. Conducting innovative research to formulate independent conservation management measures

China combines domestic and foreign research results with up-to-date information on its DWF development. Through collaborative efforts involving the government, industry, universities and research institutes, China actively conducts innovative research and formulates independent measures to conserve and manage fisheries resources. In June 2020, China issued management regulations to strengthen the conservation of high seas squid resources and promote the sustainable development of DWF. Measures included squid resource surveys and assessment, implementation of voluntary fishing moratoria for high seas squid fisheries, and research on the management system of the entire squid industry chain. China is actively exploring the compilation of DWF indexes to improve resource assessment capability, standardize practices, and guide sustainable industry development. Initiated with the squid as a pilot species, the oceanic squid index of China was developed and launched in 2020. This comprehensive index incorporates the squid resource abundance index, squid price index, and industry prosperity index, providing detailed and dynamic data to monitor squid products and the overall development of the distant-water squid fishery sector. In the next phase, work will be directed to studying and releasing the tuna fishery development index.

5. Carrying out timely research and adaptation of international conservation management measures

China emphasizes the importance of resource assessment and utilizing the best scientific evidence when making conservation management recommendations and formulating management measures. It actively engages in research on scientific management recommendations proposed by RFMOs. Additionally, China supports the participation of scientific researchers in various scientific conferences and their involvement in relevant scientific organizations. Focusing on resource assessment, China carries out research on fish population biology, ecosystem management, and the evaluation of fishing moratorium effects. China also actively participates in relevant research programs and submits a variety of research reports. In addition, it conducts in-depth studies on conservation and management measures adopted by RFMOs. China has issued documents on the conservation and management measures adopted by tuna fisheries organizations, the North Pacific Fisheries Commission and the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation. These measures are promptly incorporated into relevant domestic management regulations to strengthen fisheries management and ensure compliance with international obligations.

VI. Ensuring Safety in the DWF Sector

China continues to upgrade its distant-water fishing infrastructure focusing on safety, eco-friendliness, sustainability, and worker protection. It is bringing the size of its distant-water fishing fleet under control. Vessel safety and the living environment of crews are being steadily improved.

1. Promoting safe and eco-friendly distant-water fishing vessels

China encourages and supports the upgrading of distant-water fishing vessels to make them safer and more eco-friendly. It has put strict restrictions on the tonnage of distant-water fishing vessels to minimize the impact of fishing on the marine environment and eco-systems. In accordance with the requirements of international conventions on pollution control and maritime safety such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and relevant domestic regulations, in 2021, China amended the parameters for standard types of distant-water fishing vessels, improved their testing rules, standardized their scrapping procedures, and improved the reliability of newly-built distant-water fishing vessels and upgraded their safety and antipollution equipment.

2. Improving vessel position monitoring and surveillance

China attaches great importance to monitoring and observing the position of distant-water fishing vessels. It has upgraded the Distant-water Fishery Service Platform and the monitoring and surveillance system to cover all such vessels. To increase capacity and improve service, it has raised the frequency of position reporting, improved the collection of data and statistics, reinforced surveillance of key areas and trespassing alarms, and required electronic fishing logbooks and position monitoring and surveillance. The authorities have invested in the National Data Center for Distant-Water Fisheries of China, developed fishing data checking and quality control, and strengthened the scientific management of production reporting, fishing logbooks, and data from fisheries observers.

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| Panel 5 Position Monitoring and Surveillance of Distant-Water Fishing Vessels |
| In order to strengthen supervision over DWF and ensure compliance, China adopted a position monitoring and surveillance system of distant-water fishing vessels in 2006. In place for more than a decade, it has played a key part in China’s distant-water fishing management. It covers all Chinese distant-water fishing vessels, monitoring their geographical range of daily activities and reporting their positions every hour to the authorities, higher than international industry standards.  Since 2021, with the support of specific technical departments, China has further adopted a daily statistical report system recording and reporting the change of position of all distant-water fishing vessels in the past 24 hours. Failing to report positions as required or reporting abnormal positions will be immediately reported to authorities for follow-up checks on the companies involved and in-time correction. Consistent improvements have been made to the position monitoring and surveillance system through additional functions such as trespassing alarms and navigation safety alerts. The system has played an important role in ensuring safe navigation and operation of distant-water fishing vessels, supervising their activities, guaranteeing that China fulfills its obligations as a flag state, and complying with international fisheries management measures. |

3. Safeguarding the lawful rights and interests of the crew

As a founding member of the International Labor Organization, China attaches great importance to the protection of workers’ rights and interests. By April 2023, it had ratified 28 international labor conventions including seven core conventions such as the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 and the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention, 1957. China prioritizes the protection of the rights and interests of distant-water fishing crew members. Consistent efforts have been made to regulate crew employment and management, enabling DWF companies to assume their full responsibilities, strengthening industry self-discipline and employment supervision, and ensuring satisfactory working conditions and proper remuneration for Chinese and international crew in accordance with the law. Companies are required to respect the following requirements:

• Pay the crew on time. Arrears of wages without justifiable cause are forbidden.

• Arrange reasonable working hours and provide sound living and working conditions for the crew.

• Properly handle the legitimate demands of the crew. Companies are required to understand, respect, and maintain an inclusive attitude towards their customs and religious beliefs and cultural differences. Discrimination, abuse or ill-treatment of the crew is strictly prohibited.

• Strengthen skills and workplace safety training and raise awareness of safety issues.

• Equip vessels with the necessary labor protection equipment and facilities to ensure a safe environment and working conditions.

• Equip vessels with essential medicines and rapidly provide all necessary medical treatment and psychological aid to crew members in need. Any illness or injury beyond the handling capacity of the vessel must be reported promptly to enable treatment.

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| Panel 6 Marine Rescue That Puts People’s Lives First |
| In recent years, Chinese distant-water fishing vessels have played an active part in fulfilling the international obligation to put people’s lives first, conducting search and rescue missions involving several fishing vessels and crew from countries including Peru, Mauritius, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. In March 2018, the Chinese fishing vessel *Zhong Shui 702* rescued three fishermen from the Solomon Islands who had been drifting for more than 20 days at the Pacific. From 2021 to 2022, Chinese distant-water fishing vessels have sailed the waters of Gambia, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Vanuatu, and Kiribati and related international waters, to conduct marine rescue operations.  China has built maritime medical stations to offer rapid treatment for crew members in emergencies. Since 2017, China has been sending medical workers to board vessels on the high seas of the Southeast Pacific to provide medical services to the crew. Built in 2021, the *Zhe Pu Yuan 98* is an integrated support vessel for distant-water fishing equipped with professional medical equipment and doctors. It conducts regular patrols of the high seas of the Southeast Pacific to provide medical services to crew members operating in the area. |

4. Strengthening safety at work and rescue at sea

China has prioritized safe working conditions in DWF. It has strengthened safety checks and the identification of potential safety hazards to ensure safe navigation for the vessel and safe production for the crew. A 24-hour emergency rescue and service mechanism has been established by the industry association and efforts have been made to put in place a mechanism of mutual aid and support at sea. The country has also explored and established a DWF emergency response mechanism. The authorities take strict action against violations of laws and regulations by crew members. A score system is in place to manage crew members’ violation of safe navigation and working practices, which helps to maintain production safety. China has also strengthened cooperation with other countries and organizations and played an active part in global marine rescue.

VII. Increasing International Cooperation   
on Fisheries

The sustainability of fisheries resources is currently threatened by climate and environmental change, creating new trends in cross-regional distribution, mobility, and migrations. International cooperation on fisheries management must therefore be strengthened. Committed to the vision of a maritime community of shared future, China has increased exchanges with other countries and regions in the DWF sector, launched mutually beneficial cooperation projects through multiple channels and in multiple forms, strengthened multilateral and bilateral intergovernmental fisheries cooperation mechanisms, and helped the fishing industry to develop in other countries and regions.

1. Participating in global fisheries governance

China has played an active role in multilateral fisheries governance within the framework of the UN, and supported calls for a fairer and more equitable global fisheries governance system. It is actively seeking to join the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and has engaged in the research of fisheries treaties like the IMO Cape Town Agreement of 2012 (on the Implementation of the Provisions of the Torremolinos Protocol of 1993 relating to the Torremolinos International Convention for the Safety of Fishing Vessels, 1977). In addition to registering its high seas fishing vessels in the FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels, it has increased cooperation with the IMO and required its DWF vessels to apply and register for IMO identification numbers.

In recent years, the international community has paid close attention to fisheries subsidies. China firmly supports the multilateral trading system and conforms to the general trend of fisheries subsidies negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Over the years, China has actively participated in the fisheries subsidies negotiations of the WTO with the aim of facilitating talks, cooperation and solution. It tries its best to take care of the interests of all participants and the demands of developing members, strives to bridge the differences among members, puts forward suggestions for text revisions, actively responds to the opinions of other members, and demonstrates flexibility, making an active contribution to the final conclusion of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. On June 27, 2023, China submitted its instrument of acceptance for the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to the WTO. It will fully implement its provisions and actively participate in the follow-up negotiations.

China attaches great importance to communication with NGOs like the World Wide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace on sustainable fisheries management, actions against illegal fishing, and other issues, and incorporated their sound proposals into its measures for voluntary fishing moratoria on the high seas and the conservation of squid resources.

2. Taking part in regional fisheries management

To show its commitment to expanding and strengthening regional fisheries cooperation, China has fulfilled its obligations as a member of RFMOs. It has made its due and voluntary financial contributions without delay to support their functions and efforts. To contribute Chinese solutions and strengths to their activities, it has organized relevant departments, scientific research institutes, industry associations, and representative companies to take part in the work of RFMOs, in the research and formulation of conservation and management measures, and in the exploration, evaluation and scientific research of fisheries resources. In order to improve fisheries governance in different regions, China has also increased communication and cooperation with RFMOs and their members.

3. Engaging in bilateral fisheries cooperation

China has made sustained efforts to increase bilateral cooperation through dialogue and exchanges, and set up a number of bilateral dialogue and negotiation mechanisms with Russia, the ROK, Japan, Vietnam, the US, Argentina, New Zealand, the EU and other countries and regions to promote mutual interests and combat illegal fishing. It has established communications with Indonesia, Panama, Peru, Ecuador and other countries and regions in terms of bilateral fisheries cooperation, regional fisheries governance, the fight against illegal fishing, protection of bycatch species, and ecological and environmental conservation in key sea areas like the Galapagos Islands. China has engaged in mutually beneficial fisheries cooperation with over 40 countries and regions in Asia, Africa, South America and Oceania, and encouraged Chinese enterprises to invest and start businesses in these countries, which has increased local jobs and boosted economic growth.

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| **Panel 7 Increasing International Cooperation and Exchanges** |
| China prioritizes international fisheries cooperation. Committed to the philosophy of innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development, China has made active efforts to increase international cooperation and promote mutual benefit.  Increasing multilateral cooperation. China has played an active role in the negotiations and discussions on the agreement on conserving marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, the International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated Fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean, the UN General Assembly’s resolution on sustainable fisheries, and the WTO fisheries subsidies agreement, and advocated an international fisheries governance mechanism that is fair, reasonable and sustainable. It participated in the IMO Ministerial Conference on Fishing Vessel Safety and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and signed the Torremolinos Declaration. China has become a member to eight RFMOs, covering almost all ocean regions of application of RFMO conventions. Besides these, it has also taken part in the activities of over 30 international organizations concerning fisheries, including the UN, the FAO, the WTO, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and relevant RFMOs. In September 2021, together with the FAO and the Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia-Pacific, it held the Fourth Global Conference on Aquaculture, aiming to increase pragmatic cooperation with other countries, promote global sustainable aquaculture development, and contribute to world food security.  Facilitating bilateral cooperation. China has established high-level dialogue mechanisms with the US, the EU, Norway, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other major fisheries countries and regions, and implemented bilateral cooperation projects with many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It held two China-Pacific Island Countries forums on fisheries cooperation and development in December 2021 and May 2023, and has provided further assistance to help these countries develop their fisheries and related industries. |

4. Supporting other developing countries in fisheries development

Committed to the vision of a maritime community of shared future, China has implemented the Belt and Road Initiative and promoted South-South cooperation. It has always done all it can to provide technological and personnel assistance to other developing countries – especially small island developing states and the least developed countries – to help them develop their fisheries and local communities. Its assistance for developing countries covers fisheries infrastructure, resource exploration, skill training, artisanal and small-scale fisheries, and the development of aquaculture, processing and trade. China supports reasonable proposals from developing countries on multilateral issues, and defends their rights and interests.

5. Promoting sustainable development of global fisheries

The international community has a common understanding that fisheries play an important role in safeguarding global food and nutrition security and providing a livelihood for the people living in coastal areas. China attaches great importance to the sustainable development of global fisheries. It believes that developing aquaculture can increase food supplies and protect food security in developing countries while reducing dependence on wild fisheries resources. China is the largest processor and exporter of aquatic products. Its aquaculture output has led the world for 32 years, making a contribution to world food security.

On the basis of equality and mutual benefit, China will work with other countries to improve multilateral consultation mechanisms, strengthen scientific and technological communication, expand economic and trade cooperation, combat illegal fishing, and promote scientific conservation and sustainable use of global fisheries resources. It will do all it can to safeguard global food security and contribute to the wellbeing of people living in coastal areas. It defends a fair and reasonable international maritime order, and firmly opposes unilateralism, protectionism, power politics, acts of bullying, and unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction that have no basis in international law.

Conclusion

Accessing the deepest oceans is the only way for humanity to better explore and protect the sea and use its resources. China will adhere to the philosophy of innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development, carry out its Global Development Initiative, increase bilateral and multilateral fisheries cooperation and dialogue in accordance with relevant international laws and bilateral cooperation agreements, promote high-quality development of the DWF sector, increase its ability to implement international fisheries treaties and conservation and management measures, and meet those international obligations that are consistent with its development.

In the current era, international ocean governance is facing fresh challenges. At this new historical threshold, China will continue to work with the rest of the world on the basis of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit to strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of the sea and its resources, and protect marine biodiversity. It will make further contribution to ensure success in completing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promote a maritime community of shared future and facilitate the green and sustainable development of the sea.

1. A flag state refers to the country where a vessel is registered and whose flag the vessel flies. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. The flag state is obliged to fulfill certain duties when allowing ships to fly its flag, including: exercise its control on technical matters, perform competency management of masters, officers and other crew members, restrict and protect the ships in accordance with internal laws, ensure the ships conform to international conventions, and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)